

# SPORT PSYCHOLOGY

Part One in a Series  
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## SPORT PSYCHOLOGY

### The Missing Ingredient in Your Program?

You can condition your athletes; closely supervise their diets, strengthen their muscles through weight training, teach them proper techniques and strategies, provide the most modern equipment and facilities; yet they seem to be sporadic in their performances — Why? Exploding upon the scene during the last few years is possibly the answer to the previous question and also the final piece of the puzzle for attaining consistent athletic excellence — the area of SPORT PSYCHOLOGY.

In the United States, this relatively new area labeled sport psychology got off to a slow start but is now beginning to gain momentum. What actually is sport psychology? It is the application of psychological principles in the sport setting at all levels of skill development. The quest for excellence in performance has, up until the present time, been treated as a solely physical endeavor. This is wrong! The human species operates best when the mind and body are functioning in correlation; but one of the greatest omissions in sports skills training has been that of recognizing this mental/physical integration necessary for optimum performance. The mental aspects of performance cannot be separated from the physical: training must be holistic. But this has not been the case in the traditional training of the athlete. A sad tribute to the traditional training of our athletes is the negative stereotype held by the general public. Many athletes are viewed as:

### **“Body by Fischer, Brain by Mattel”**

This concept of course is absurd. The modern day athlete is an intellectual as well as a physical being. Athletes are performers, therefore they must learn skills (psychological) that will enhance performance. Here is where sport psychology enters. Once an athlete has mastered a strong base of physical skills, then, and only then, can this individual progress improve by means of his/her psychological development. The major role of sport psychology is teaching mental skills and strategies to sports participants. It has little to do with providing therapy or treating social misbehaviors.

How many times have you coached athletes who possess all the physical skills to attain greatness, but who always seem to make mental errors or “choke” during crucial moments? Nothing you can do physically will help these athletes perform. The only solution will be in the psychological realm.

### **“Performances don’t happen, they are caused”**

As stated earlier, sport psychology applied correctly will help athletes gain **control skills** which transfer to game situations. Skills such as learning to relax, being able to concentrate, and generally being poised under any circumstances are available to all athletes today. The point is that physical development is only half of what is needed to be a high level performer. The other half is psychological. Because



### **We Must Teach Athletes to be INTENSE but not TENSE!**

good practicers, but fail to achieve during the actual game or contest.

Sport psychology is more than just motivating an athlete or “psyching” them up. It is the training of an athlete to control the environment they are in rather than having the environment control them. We don’t lose skills, rather we lose psychological control. Wouldn’t it be wonderful if your athletes would perform to the best of their abilities no matter what the circumstances? It is not impossible you know? In fact, it is very feasible. Methods are not readily available to achieve this very end. We must learn how to teach excellence.

Excellence involves two components:

1. Commitment
2. Self Control

Almost all athletes have the commitment to do well, but self control is another matter. This is where the offerings of sport psychology become valuable.

It is time that we as coaches provide training in the psychological aspects of sports. For far too long we have concentrated only on the physical and hoped that the psychological skills would develop on their own. This just does not happen with any regularity. If we are to really do justice to our athletes, we must address the psychological side of competing. All coaches and athletes should realize that mental processes regulate both bodily action and emotional states. Emotional states affect thinking and physical performance, and physical performance affects thoughts and feelings.

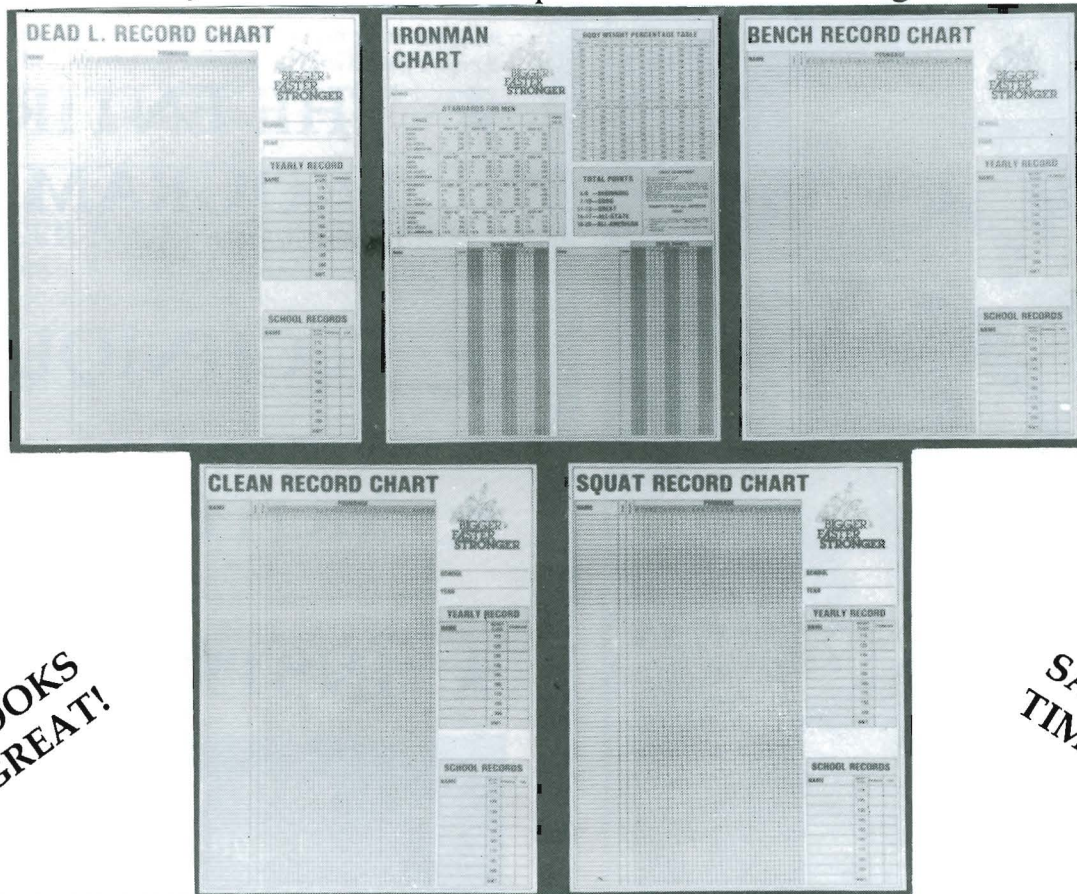
This initial article was designed to present the problems associated with Sport Psychology, and also to lay the foundation for a series of articles dealing with various aspects of performing. Future articles will discuss such issues as: psyching up or psyching down, preparation of different types of teams, psychological profiling, how to break the tradition of losing, precompetition preparation, handling post competition, etc. The next article will deal with motivation and psyching. Remember the psychological controls the physiological.





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